

High Priority Schools Grant Program

Overview

Assembly Bill 961, Chapter 747, Statutes of 2001, established the High Priority Schools Grant (HPSG) Program for Low Performing Schools. This program is intended to assist the lowest performing schools in the state in raising student achievement by offering additional resources targeted to student performance.

The legislation provides:

1. Funding for an optional planning grant (e.g., schools that are ready to implement an action plan may choose to forgo the planning grant and immediately request an implementation grant), and/or
2. Funding for a three-year implementation grant with the possibility of a fourth year of funding, and
3. An accountability system to document student achievement.

Beginning in the 2002-03 fiscal year schools participating in the HPSG program will receive \$400 per student with a \$200 per student matching requirement. Schools currently participating in the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) will receive an additional \$200 per student for a total of \$400 per student. It is the intent of the legislation to provide funding to schools as quickly as possible. Therefore, the earlier an application is submitted, the sooner schools will receive funding. The complete text of the legislation may be viewed through a link on our web site at www.cde.ca.gov/iiusp.

Enclosed is a list of schools in your district in Academic Performance Index (API) statewide decile rank 1 (see Attachment 2). Schools with an asterisked API score (those with 11-99 valid test scores) are not ranked in deciles, but their asterisked API scores will determine their eligibility for participation in the HPSG program. The lowest ranking schools by API score in the first decile will have the highest priority for HPSG funding. Although the legislation allows schools in decile ranks 2, 3, 4 and 5 to participate in HPSG, it requires that priority be given to the schools with the lowest API score. The CDE believes all eligible schools will take advantage of this opportunity. Thus, at this time, it is unlikely all decile rank 1 schools, or any school in decile ranks 2, 3, 4, and 5 will be able to participate in HPSG.

Future funding for another HPSG cohort of schools is also unknown.

All schools in decile rank 1, including schools currently participating in II/USP or CSRD, are encouraged to take advantage of this funding opportunity in the 2001-02 fiscal year. Be aware that the 2001-2002 deadline for application to the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) has passed and new funding will not be available until the fall of 2002. Therefore, HPSG represents a final funding opportunity to assist low performing schools this fiscal year.

Interventions for Low-Performing Schools

The Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) created the Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) in 1999 to assist schools in the lowest five deciles of the API to improve student achievement. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program, a federally funded program, was also implemented in California in 1999 and expanded the options available for the implementation of school action plans. To date 1,290 schools are participating in either II/USP or CSRD to improve pupil academic performance.

HPSG, II/USP and CSRD have a common purpose: to provide schools with additional resources to improve the delivery of curriculum and instruction, and ultimately, the improvement of student achievement. Implementing change in the classroom often requires schools to implement broad systemic changes. For example, analyzing student achievement data may result in the redirection of fiscal resources or a change in the school's schedule to provide more effective interventions for students not currently meeting standards. The data may also result in decisions by schools to discontinue programs that have proven to be ineffective over time.

However, schools do not exist in a vacuum. Districts have a pivotal role in supporting school change. Sustaining school improvement requires individual and organizational change at the school level, coupled with consistent support from the district office and other external entities. Like districts, county offices have an important role in providing services to schools and districts based on the specific, data-driven needs of schools.

HPSG, II/USP and CSRD each have strong accountability requirements. All schools participating in each program must either meet or exceed academic growth targets or potentially face interventions and/or sanctions.

Requirement for Public Hearings

All districts receiving this letter must hold a public hearing to discuss participation in AB 961. Districts applying on behalf of decile 1 schools must hold a public hearing at a regularly scheduled board meeting before January 15, 2002 in order to meet the deadline for submission of the application contained in Attachment 2. The public hearing should be held prior to submitting the application.

If a school district on behalf of a decile 1 school decides not to accept the invitation to participate in HPSG the justification for doing so must be discussed at a public hearing. (This hearing may be combined with the one above.) The purpose of the hearing is to discuss how the district intends to address the needs of the decile 1 school and its pupils. Notice requirements include invitations to parent organizations, the local media, the mayor, the city council, the county board of supervisors, the county superintendents of schools, and the county board of education [E.C. Section 52055.615 (b)].

Participation Options for Schools Already in II/USP

If decile 1 schools in the district are currently participating in II/USP or CSRD

implementation, HPSG resources represent an excellent opportunity to receive additional resources to help in the implementation of their school action plans. Program requirements are:

- The II/USP \$200 per student matching requirement is sustained.
- The timelines under the II/USP or CSRD implementation plan remain the same (e.g., schools in Cohort 1 will only receive one partial year of HPSG funding and continue to be subject to potential state intervention in 2002-03 if growth targets are not met).
- The existing school action plan must be modified to meet HPSG plan requirements. Schools presently in II/USP are not eligible to apply for a new planning grant. Districts will be asked to certify that their plans have been modified to address the four essential components required in plans of schools participating in the HPSG program. Information on this certification process will be provided at a later date.
- HPSG schools must participate in both the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (AB 466, Chapter 737, Statutes of 2001) and the Principal Training Program (AB 75, Chapter 697, Statutes of 2001) Please note: Cohorts 1 and 2 schools will need to assure future participation in the trainings.
- The district must submit an annual report to CDE detailing achievement of objectives outlined in AB 961 (E.C. Section 52055.540).

If decile 1 schools in the district are currently receiving a *planning* grant under II/USP (i.e., schools recently identified in October of 2001), the schools may decide to enhance action plans and receive additional funding prorated for this year by participating in HPSG.

For these schools the deadline for submission of the school action plan has been moved from May 15, 2002 to March 15, 2002. If the action plan is completed prior to March 15th, a district can submit it for immediate consideration by CDE. Program requirements are:

- The II/USP \$200 per student matching requirement is sustained.
- The action plan will have to address the four components of the HPSG program (details on action plan requirements will be sent under separate cover.).
- HPSG schools must participate in both the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (AB 466, Chapter 737, Statutes of 2001) and in the Principal Training Program (AB 75, Chapter 697, Statutes of 2001).
- The district must submit an annual report to CDE detailing achievement of objectives outlined in AB 961 (E.C. Section 52055.540).
- Schools will have 36 months in which to implement their action plan, with a possible fourth year of funding if growth targets are not met each year, but the school is making significant academic progress.

Participation Options for Non-II/USP Schools

If decile 1 schools are not currently participating in II/USP, the district has two options as discussed below:

Planning Grants

Schools may elect to receive a planning grant of \$50,000. To do so, the district must have held a public hearing to discuss whether or not to submit an application. Please note that planning grants are optional under HPSG. Eligible schools that wish to receive a HPSG planning grant must:

- Commit to participating in both the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (AB 466, Chapter 737, Statutes of 2001) and the Principal Training Program (AB 75, Chapter 697, Statutes of 2001).
- Submit a one-page application (Attachment 2) by January 15, 2002.
- Obtain technical assistance from a state approved external evaluator, or with any entity that has proven successful expertise specific to the challenges inherent in low-performing schools, including universities, county offices of education and school district personnel.
- Use the planning grant funds for technical assistance in developing the action plan.
- Develop an action plan with the schoolsite council or its equivalent in partnership with the district.
- Hold a public school board meeting to present the action plan and obtain approval.
- Submit the action plan to CDE on or before March 15, 2002 for approval by the State Board of Education. If a school completes the action plan before March 15, 2002, the district may submit the plan for immediate consideration by CDE.
- Agree to participate in II/USP including the \$200 matching requirement.

Implementation Grants

A school may elect to forego the planning grant phase and immediately submit its HPSG application and action plan to CDE. To do so, a district must have held a public hearing to discuss whether or not to submit an application. If a school elects to do this, it must:

- Commit to participation in both the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (AB 466, Chapter 737, Statutes of 2001) and the Principal Training Program (AB 75, Chapter 697, Statutes of 2001).
- Present the action plan at a regularly scheduled local board hearing and obtain approval of the plan.
- Submit the action plan to CDE by March 15, 2002 that addresses the four essential HPSG components and all II/USP planning criteria. (Please note that the Department is working to consolidate these requirements. Further information will be mailed under separate cover.). Existing plans that meet these criteria may be used, provided that they include a data-driven needs assessment and documentation process. The required components of the HPSG include:
 1. Pupil literacy and achievement
 2. Quality of staff
 3. Parental involvement and
 4. Facilities, curriculum, instructional materials, and support services

- Submit an annual report to CDE detailing achievement of objectives outlined in AB 961 (E.C. Section 52055.540).
- Agree to participate in II/USP including the \$200 matching requirement.

State Action Plan Approval Process

Once CDE receives an action plan, the State Superintendent will review the plan and do one of the following:

- Recommend approval to the State Board of Education and provide implementation funding upon State Board action.
- Request additional clarification and technical changes, and upon resubmission, recommend approval to the State Board of Education and provide implementation funding upon approval.
- Disapprove the plan. In this case, if the district has not yet received a planning grant, it will receive a \$50,000 planning grant.

Funding

Planning Grants: After receipt of the request for planning grant funds, schools will receive \$50,000, all or part of which is to be used for technical assistance in developing the action plan. Please be advised that schools receiving planning and implementation grants in the same fiscal year will not receive more than \$400 per student.

Implementation Grants: Funding for implementation grants will be released after the State Board approves the action plan. In the 2001-02 fiscal year, schools will receive a pro-rated monthly amount per student based on CBEDS certified enrollment data for the 2000-01 school year. The grant amount will be calculated beginning in the month immediately following state board approval.

Beginning in the 2002-03 fiscal year:

- Schools participating in the HPSG program will receive \$400 per student with a \$200 per student matching requirement.
- Funding is available for three years, with the possibility of one additional year of funding if a school does not meet its API growth target but makes significant progress, as defined by the State Board.

Schools that meet growth targets in the fourth year and are eligible for awards under the Governor's Performance Award program will have their implementation funding adjusted by the award amount.

Accountability

The goal of HPSG is that these additional resources will assist all participating schools to implement changes to improve pupil performance. For schools that do not meet growth targets, the following provisions apply:

1. After twenty-four months of full implementation funding, if growth targets have not been met annually:
 - The school must hold a public hearing notifying the school community of the lack of progress.
 - The State Board shall review the school's progress.
 - The local board may be required to provide corrective assistance.
2. After thirty-six months of full implementation funding, if growth targets have not been met annually:
 - The school may potentially receive an additional year of funding if it has made significant progress (as defined by the State Board), even though growth targets have not been met.
 - The Superintendent of Public Instruction will intervene with the approval of the State Board of Education and impose one or more sanctions if the school has not met growth targets or made significant progress.

HOW TO APPLY FOR THE HIGH PRIORITY SCHOOLS GRANT PROGRAM

Attachment 2 is the application to apply for a \$50,000 planning grant or a commitment to seek implementation funding.

Please check the appropriate boxes, complete all required information and return to CDE by January 15, 2002. Keep in mind that districts must hold a public hearing to discuss participation in HPSG prior to submitting a request for planning grant funds or submitting a commitment to apply for implementation grant funds.

CDE will release planning grant funds as quickly as possible after receipt of the request. Therefore, it is to a school's benefit for the district to discuss HPSG at the next local governing board meeting and submit a request for funding immediately thereafter. If the district elects to receive a planning grant, the school will have to develop an action plan.

If the district expresses a commitment for an implementation grant, the completed action plan must be sent to CDE by March 15, 2002. More specific requirements on the action plan will follow.

Attachments:

Attachment 1 is a chart comparing the various interventions for underperforming schools

Attachment 2 is the application to apply for a planning grant or express a commitment to apply for an implementation grant.